

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

Francesco tells us that he at once went to her, " albeit not without great shame and fear. But she, like a most benign and sweetest mother, received me with a joyful countenance, giving the greatest comfort to my weakness. And a few days afterwards, when I went to her again, and one of the virgin's women companions said to her, as it were in blame of me, that I had little stability, she said with a smile : * Never mind, my sisters, for he cannot escape out of my hands, let him go by what way he will; for when he thinks that I am far from him, I shall put such a yoke upon his neck that he will never be able to slip out of it.' At this time, I had both wife and children. The sisters, and I with them, laughed at these words, and we made merry, nor did any of us then think any more about them."¹

At Siena, Catherine had again taken up her apostolic mission labouring for the conversion of souls, making peace between enemies, tending and comforting the afflicted. Above all, at this time, the prisoners and those doomed to death by the law claimed her ministrations. The government lived in daily apprehension of conspiracies ; the prisons were full; executions were incessant. At the beginning of this year, 1377, a young noble of Gubbio Gaddo Accorimboni, had been made podestà, and, in the hope of obtaining the senatorship, he set about his work with the most ruthless severity, caring less for justice than for winning a reputation as an inflexible and vigorous magistrate. We have still the beautiful letter that, on the Thursday in Holy Week Catherine addressed to the prisoners under his heavy hand exhorting them to gain true patience in the contemplation of the blood of Christ crucified.² It was probably now that the episode in her life occurred that is known to so many that know nothing else of Catherine, by Bazzi's fresco and Mr. Swinburne's poem. A young Perugian noble, apparently little more than a youth Niccolò di Toldo, attached to the household of the Senator

Gigli (266) or Tommaseo (45). It is also one of those included in the Bolognese edition of 1492.

¹ *Contestatio Franciscide Malavoltis*, cap. i., MS. cit., p. 433.

² Letter 260 (309). Cf. *Cronaca Senese*, col. 351.